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AUTHOR	Haas, Mary E.
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ABSTRACT

Forms that social studies teachers can use to evaluate sponsored materials and guest speakers are provided. Sponsoring organizations prepare instructional materials that they would like to be used as presented. They often argue for the quality of the materials based on the facts that they were prepared by educators; contain objectives, definitions, activity suggestions, and tests; and have been classroom tested. However, when the free sponsored materials are examined, they are often found to contain such critical thinking errors as failure to substantiate assertions with facts, distortion of facts through the use of propaganda techniques, and the misrepresentation of viewpoints. Therefore, sponsored materials and guest speakers need to be carefully evaluated. Two evaluation forms are provided. The first, "Teacher Evaluation of Sponsored Materials," should be used during the selection and lesson planning phase. This form might also be given to an individual or group with objections to the use of a particular set of sponsored materials. The second form, "Guest Speaker Evaluation," is designed to help the teacher and student evaluate a speaker's presentation. (RM)

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How To Do It
IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

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SERIES 4 NUMBER 3

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EVALUATING SPONSORED MATERIALS

MARY E. HAAS, Assistant Professor of Secondary Education, Arkansas Tech University, Russellville

Folk wisdom provides us with two expedient sayings: "Never look a gift horse in the mouth" and "There is no such thing as a free lunch." Using sponsored materials puts the teacher in the middle of these adages — always a difficult position to hold. On the one hand, sponsored materials are often free, easy to obtain or the only quickly available ones. On the other hand, all sponsored materials contain viewpoints based on the values of the organization that pays for their production. In other words, the sponsors have an ax to grind. When using sponsored materials, always consider the purposes of the sponsoring person or organization.

If the goal of social studies education is to prepare students to be active citizens in a democracy where they will encounter social "critics" and social "saviors," then a portion of the Social Studies curriculum should be devoted to studying current and controversial social issues. An integral part of that study is the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to analyze and evaluate controversial issues. Sponsored materials can assist the teacher in attaining the goal of developing critical thinking skills.

They can effectively supplement content learning by providing local or case studies of specific concepts and events. For current events, sponsored statements, materials and speakers may be among the very first resources available. In the study of the local

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TEACHER EVALUATION OF SPONSORED MATERIALS

1. What organizarion produced the materials?

_____

2. How evident is the sponsor's name or trademark? (circle one)

Overly evident Clearly present Hidden Absent

3. What are the major objectives of the materials?

_____

_____

4. What are the minor objectives of the materials?

_____

_____

5. Do the materials teach any unstated objectives? Yes No

Specify _____

6. Do the materials promote a particular product or type or product? Yes No Specify _____

7. Is the identification of the product or brand necessary to teach the objectives of the lesson? Yes No

Comment _____

8. Are you aware of other materials that will teach the same topic? Yes No Specify _____

9. If you use the materials, what conclusions do you expect the students will make about the topic?

_____

_____

10. If you use the materials, what feelings about the sponsors and their goals might you expect the students to express? (circle appropriate) None Favorable Sympathetic Negative

11. How are the viewpoints of the materials supported? (circle appropriate) Assertions Facts Opinions Assumptions

12. Are the sources of the facts in the materials identified? Yes No Comment _____

13. What important facts are omitted from the materials?

_____

_____

14. What assumptions about the topic do the materials make?

_____

_____

15. What other assumptions can be made about the topic?

_____

_____

16. What additional conclusions would follow from the new assumptions?

_____

17. Do the materials use out-of-context quotes to support their viewpoints when the complete quote would not support them? (circle appropriate) Yes No Specify _____

_____

18. Do the materials use half-truths to support their viewpoints? (circle appropriate) Yes No Specify _____

_____

19. Do the materials use emotionally loaded words or pictures? Yes No Specify _____

20. How do you expect the students will respond to the words or pictures? _____

community or state history, sponsored materials and speakers may be of great help if the teacher is short of instructional materials, time and money.

In a rapidly changing society the goals of different groups often come into conflict with one another. Many organizations have important and worthy goals, and it is their right to promote and advertise their goals and to attempt to win converts to their views. It is also the right of groups to examine public issues that threaten their goals. Related questions for educators are: Is it the right of an organization to present its views to school children through the use of class time? If yes, how should such presentations be labeled? What should be the characteristics of the materials?

Sponsoring organizations prepare units of materials that they would like used as presented. They hire educators to prepare the materials and argue for the quality of the materials based on the fact that they were prepared by educators; contain objectives, definitions, activity suggestions and tests; and have been classroom tested. However, when the "teeth" of the "free" materials are examined, sponsored materials across the political spectrum are often guilty of such critical thinking errors as failure to substantiate assertions with facts, distortion of facts through the use of propaganda techniques and the misrepresentation of viewpoints. Therefore, sponsored materials and guest speakers need to be carefully evaluated, since it takes thoughtful planning to use sponsored materials fully and effectively in the classroom.

Several evaluation forms are provided for the supervisor, teacher or curriculum committee, each requiring different methods for use. The TEACHER EVALUATION OF SPONSORED MATERIALS should be used during the selection and lesson planning phase. This form might also be given to an individual or group who might object to the use of a particular set of sponsored materials to help clarify an objection. The GUEST SPEAKER EVALUATION FORM is designed to assist the teacher and student evaluate the speaker's presentation. To be a critical listener, the student must both reflect on what is heard and question what is about to be heard. The listener does not have the ability to reread a portion of the presentation for missed information. The teacher should make the student aware of the questions on the form and discuss their meaning and implications prior to hearing a guest speaker. The form can be used as a guide for a discussion to review and evaluate the speech following its presentation.

The evaluation forms are designed to assist the teacher. Any nonapplicable questions may be skipped. Where spaces are provided for comments or specifics, the teacher can save time by noting the specific error or concern and its location in the materials during the evaluation. It is assumed that, should the evaluation form reveal errors in logic, biased or inaccurate data, or propaganda techniques, the teacher will see that such information is either eliminated or the accuracy of the materials is evaluated by the students during the instructional process.

21. Do the materials use jingles or music to encourage remembering aspects of the topic? Yes No Specify_____

_____

22. Do the materials associate their topic and views with familiar people, events or characters with which students may have a favorable identification? Yes No Specify_____

_____

23. Do the materials use excessive repetition to reinforce particular facts or conclusions? Yes No Specify_____

_____

24. Do the materials use so much technical language that the students will become confused in trying to read and understand the materials? Yes No Specify_____

_____

_____

25. Do the materials divert the attention of the user to side issues and fail to address the key issues? Yes No

Specify_____

26. How do the materials comment on the views of those who hold a different perspective on the issues? (circle appropriate)

Respectfully With contempt As misguided

As poor thinkers As evil intended Not at all

Other (specify) _____

GUEST SPEAKER EVALUATION

1. What is the topic of the speech?

_____

2. What is the speaker trying to convince the listener about?

_____

3. What does the speaker or organization have to gain from convincing others to agree with its viewpoints?

_____

4. In presenting information, does the speaker clearly identify fact from opinion and hypothesis? Yes No

Specify_____

5. Are the facts presented from a variety of independent, reliable sources or are the facts from "our scientists" or "our studies"?

_____

6. Are the sources of facts, opinions, hypotheses and conclusions identified by name? Yes No Specify_____

_____

7. Are the sources reliable and respected?

Yes No Specify_____

_____

8. What consequences or conclusions does the speaker predict if his or her views become public policy?

_____

_____

9. Do you think the consequences would be good for most people?

Yes No Specify _____

10. For whom might the consequences be bad or present a hardship?

_____

11. How does the speaker treat other viewpoints on the subject? (circle appropriate)

As a joke	Respectfully	As evil minded
As misguided	Ignores them	Other (specify) ____

_____

12. When answering questions, does the speaker give confusing answers with a lot of technical language?

Yes No Specify_____

_____

_____

13. Does the speaker give one "pet" or simple answer to many questions?

Yes No Specify_____

_____

In making a thorough evaluation of a set of sponsored materials, the teacher will recognize both its strengths and weaknesses, and thus be better prepared to teach the topic. He or she will know if it is necessary to supplement the materials with additional questions, speakers, materials, library research or discussion or to use all or part of the materials as written. The evaluation may cost the teacher considerable time. However, it has the potential of providing the base for better instruction and avoiding an embarrassing or time-consuming controversy.

The How To Do It Notebook series 4, designed for a loose leaf binder, provides a practical and useful source of classroom methods and techniques for elementary and secondary social studies teachers. The series is published by the National Council for the Social Studies, 3501 Newark Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20016. Additional copies: 1–9 copies, $2.00 each; 10–49 copies, $1.60 each; 50–99 copies, $1.40 each; 100–499 copies, $1.20 each; 500–999 copies, $1.00 each; 1000 or more, $.80 each.